



December 8, 2019

Sermon Series: For the World is About to Turn

The World Is About to Turn
Pastor Lisa Kipp

Isaiah 40:1-11 NRSV

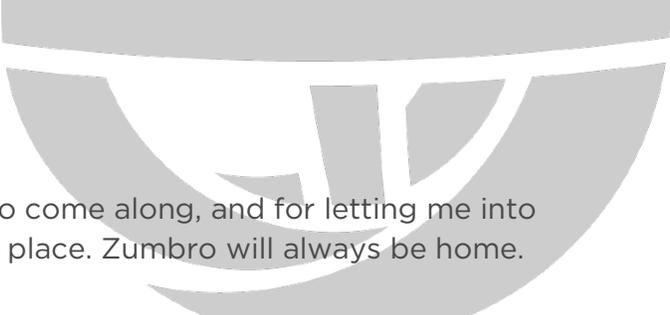
Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

³A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

⁶A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. ⁷The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. ⁸The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever. ⁹Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" ¹⁰See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

This last month has been something like a walk down memory lane. After nineteen years serving on the staff here at Zumbro, I've realized that my memories really are countless. Some of them are hard memories from challenging times we've faced together. Some are from the greatest celebrations imaginable. And many are from absolutely crazy mission adventures that we couldn't have made up if we tried. Thank you for all of them.

Thank you for trusting me to help you raise your young people ... and for creating an incredible place for John and I to raise our own sons. Thank you for giving me permission



to try new things, for saying *yes* when I invited you to come along, and for letting me into your lives. I have been so blessed to be a part of this place. Zumbro will always be home.

One of my greatest joys has been to walk alongside families for a generation. The Anderson family is just one of those families. I met Jim and Judy during my early years here at Zumbro. Their children, Jon and Nicky, were part of the youth group at that time. I remember the kids' confirmations and watching them play hockey at the Rec Center. As Nicky grew older, I met her fiancée Dayton, we sat in my office together through premarital sessions, I presided at their wedding, and I baptized their girls. But of all the moments that I will remember from this family, it is Miss Amazing Maisey that will forever stand out.

Nicky went into labor on April 27 of this year. Nicky and Dayton already had two daughters at home, so they knew the drill. And they knew this birth wasn't going to be anything like the previous ones. "The baby might not be pink," they were warned by doctors and nurses. "You likely won't hear a cry. She will probably have tubes placed in her very quickly." You see, Maisey was born three months before Nicky and Dayton were expecting her to arrive. With a gestational age of just 25 weeks and 3 days, everyone knew Maisey had an uphill battle ahead of her.

When she was born on Sunday, April 28, she weighed just 1 pound, 10 ounces, and was 12 inches long. A hospital chaplain was present, baptizing Maisey immediately while her daddy stood by her side. Maisey was quickly taken to the NICU at St. Mary's. Eventually, family could come to visit, including big sisters Riley and Mia. This was the outfit Maisey wore the first time I was able to visit her. Just look at how tiny she was inside it. Here was the size of one of her very first diapers.

Doctors don't know exactly why Miss Maisey was born so early, or why she ended up needing to spend so many days in the NICU. First it was her size that kept her in. She needed to grow. Then there were stomach complications and a hole in her heart that hadn't closed on its own. Then there were breathing challenges and scary spells where she would stop breathing altogether.

Finally, On October 19, Maisey left the hospital. In a text message to Pastor Vern and me, Nicky sent this picture and wrote, "WE ARE HOME!!! Miss Maisey passed all of her necessary tests and Dayton and I were given the crash course on our new norm ... and we left today! 174 days in, 11 lbs, 12 oz ... Although our adventure is not over, one chapter of our lives is closed! Our family is now under the same roof!" After lifting Maisey up in prayer at worship for 25 consecutive Sunday mornings, God answered with what felt like a miracle. Here is a new picture from just a couple weeks ago.





This morning, we're going to gather around the baptismal font with Maisey and her whole family. Not because we're going to baptize Maisey again; God has already claimed her in baptism. We're gathering today to have a public recognition in this space, to give Maisey's parents and sponsors an opportunity to make promises to pass on faith to her, and to give all of you a chance to publicly make those promises, too.

A couple of months ago as Maisey's discharge date was starting to be discussed, I asked Nicky if she was going to bring Maisey to church anytime soon. I'll never forget her answer to me, "Yes, I'm bringing her to church," she said. "She needs to meet all the people that prayed for her to make it this far."

Nicky said she doesn't know what they did to deserve all the support they've received. She'll readily tell you that Dayton was her backbone, and that faith and prayer got them all through it. In fact, one night as she prayed with the older girls, she discovered that Mia, at age 1 ½ had started dipping her fingers in the fish bowl and making the sign of the cross on her forehead with the water. And at age 5, Riley would look outside on a beautiful day and declare that God painted that picture for Maisey today. In the midst of the hardest of times, God continually showed up for Maisey and her family ... even at those times when it felt like the world was standing still.

Author Brené Brown experienced a similar time in her life; a time when she felt like her world was standing still. She longed for God to intervene and do a new thing in her life. I suspect that many of us have felt similar feelings at one time or another. Facing a mid-life crisis of sorts, Brown tried returning to church because she thought, "This life is hard, and all of the midlife unraveling books say, 'Go back to church.'" So Brown returned, and admits that she wanted God to come to her like an epidural the moment she stepped foot into the sanctuary. She was longing for God to provide an easy fix. She had hoped that if she returned to church, that God would show up and instantly numb the pain and take away all of her suffering. Instead she discovered that God showed up less like an epidural and more like a midwife that said, "Push! It's supposed to hurt a little bit, but I'll stay right here with you and lean into the discomfort by your side." Instead of numbing the pain, God came to comfort her like a nurturing partner, reminding her to breath, all the while taking care that something beautiful and lasting would be birthed in the process.

Brené Brown longed for God to show up and instantly change the world around her. But it didn't happen that way. It didn't happen that way for Maisey's family, either. Nicky describes Maisey's 174 days in the hospital as the longest, short period of their lives.

The people of Israel knew what this felt like. In fact, they'd been wandering and lost and pleading with God to turn their world around for years. They had been living in exile, experiencing judgment and punishment. They wondered where God was in the midst of





their dark, somber world. Perhaps you've wondered the same question. Into this experience, came the prophetic and tender words of Isaiah 40. *Comfort, O comfort my people. God is with you. Here he is. God's word will stand forever. Like a good mother, God will gently guide you home.*

With a fresh voice and promise that God was present, glimmers of light began to shine once again. God didn't promise the way home would be easy, but God promised that God would be there. Theologian Walter Bruegemann describes God's comfort not simply as an offer of solace, but as a "powerful intervention that creates new possibilities."

This God of new possibilities is the God we look for and await during Advent. This God of new possibilities is the God who slowly worked in Maisey's life, nursing her to health and leading her home. This God of new possibilities is the God who will guide me on my next adventure ... and the God who will send new leadership and fresh ideas to this congregation. And this God of new possibilities is the God who will show up for you this Advent - not like an epidural to take all of your pain away, but like a midwife, coaching and guiding you toward the manger, toward a home that will always welcome you and promises to fill you with peace. Amen.

